

Afterschool Learning Opportunities Make a Difference



Center for Youth Development

Afterschool Learning Opportunities Matter

Afterschool opportunities refer to the wide variety of structured, supervised and intentional programs youth participate in during the hours before and afterschool, on weekends, during school vacations and over the summer. When these programs are of high quality, research shows they can have powerful effects.

Benefits of Afterschool Programs

Academic Benefits

Youth who participate in afterschool activities experience benefits in both academic achievement and behaviors related to school performance:

- Better attitudes toward school and higher educational aspirations
- Higher school attendance rates and less tardiness
- Less disciplinary action (e.g., suspension)
- Lower dropout rates
- Better performance in school, as measured by achievement test scores and grades
- Greater on time promotion
- Improved homework completion
- Increased engagement in learning¹

Social and Emotional Benefits

There are multiple social and emotional benefits as well. Social emotional benefits relate primarily to improvements in personal adjustment and functioning. Participation in afterschool programs is associated with decreases in behavioral problems; improved social and communication skills and/or relationships with others (peers, parents, teachers); increased self confidence, self esteem and self efficacy; lower levels of depression and anxiety; development of initiative and improved feelings and attitudes toward self and school.²

Prevention

Participation in afterschool programs affords young people positive alternatives to unsupervised time and potentially prevents exposure to community risks. Prevention outcomes associated with after school programs include avoidance of drug and alcohol use; decreases in delinquency and violent behavior; increased knowledge of safe sex; avoidance of sexual activity and reduction in juvenile crime.³

Promoting Health and Wellness

Involvement in afterschool programs can contribute to healthier lifestyles and increased knowledge of nutrition and exercise for youth who participate in programs with this focus. Health and wellness outcomes associated with participation in afterschool programs include: better food choices; increased physical activity; increased knowledge of nutrition and health practices; reduction of BMI (Body Mass Index) improved blood pressure and improved body image. Studies indicate changes in attitudes and understanding of general health, fitness and wellness of young people.⁴

Summer Learning

Youth participating in summer learning opportunities whether camps or programs perform better when they go back to school in the fall. Youth who attend high-quality youth programs are less likely to experience summer learning loss. These programs also serve as a buffer against the achievement gap.

Bottom Line

Research demonstrates afterschool programs and activities are rich environments for positive development and learning. Meaningful involvement and challenging opportunities in afterschool activities pay off for young people in powerful ways. When youth are actively engaged in high-quality developmental opportunities, life-long changes are also taking place in the brain—capacities for planning, decision making and foreseeing consequences.⁵ Quality afterschool opportunities offer experiences that help practice many important skills in life.

- 1 Little, Priscilla M.D., Wimer, Christopher, & Weiss, H. (2007). After School Programs in the 21st Century: Their Potential and What it Takes to Achieve It. Harvard Family Research Project.
- 2 Little et al, 2007.
- 3 Little et al, 2007.
- 4 Birmingham, J., Pechman, E. M., Russell, C. A., & Mielke, M. (2005). Share features of high-performing after-school programs: A follow-up to the TASC evaluation. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.
- 5 Baird, Abigail. Inquiry to Impact: Bridging Research with Practice May 10, 2007, Adolescent Brain Development. Proceedings.; Baird, AA, Gruber SA, Fein DA, et al. Functional magnetic resonance imaging of facial affect recognition in children and adolescents. Journal of the American Academy of child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1999; 38 (2) 195-9.